

# 1858 visitor admired Yorkville

An unidentified traveler left the village of Pacolet near Spartanburg in 1858 on his way to Yorkville, the county seat of York District. He kept a journal that is short but interesting.

He crossed the Broad River at Howell's Ferry and noted that "fingerboards" pointed the way.



LOUISE  
PETTUS

Fingerboards were required by state law at every crossroad so that travelers would not be inconvenienced. Some of the sign painters were quite artistic and constructed a pointer that looked like a hand with the finger pointing; others merely cut the board to a point on one end or painted an arrow with the name of the next town and the number of miles. Because mischief

makers were likely to turn the fingerboards around, many roads had permanent stone markers.

The traveler noted that there were many hills to Yorkville (the present-day York), which he called one of the prettiest towns in the state. He stayed at an inn run by Colonel Stowe, "the jolliest of landlords."

He was surprised at how narrow the main street of Yorkville was but thought there were many handsome buildings. He especially was impressed with the "elegant dwellings." The

## ■ It had narrow main street but elegant dwellings.

Female Academy (on East Jefferson Street and now called the McCelvey building) was a special object of local pride along with the new buildings of the Kings Mountain Military Academy under the direction of Micah Jenkins and Asbury Coward.

On his second day in Yorkville, the traveler went to the village of Ebenezer (now a part of Rock Hill) for a review of the state militia. It was a special occasion with Gen. States Rights Gist and his sunburned troops being reviewed by his Excellency, Gov. R.F.W. Allston, who had been with the men in their encampment for two weeks. The traveler stated that a live governor was a rare sight in this part of the country and a governor who lived out in the field was even rarer. The governor complimented the troops on their fitness.

Allston was noted for his support of a free public education for all children. It was a radical idea in 1858.

The traveler estimated that Ebenezer village had 15 to 20 families. It was located "only a mile or two" from the Charlotte and Columbia railroad. (Actually, when the railroad had proposed to build its track closer to Ebenezer village in 1849, there was such a protest that the railroad built elsewhere, thereby creating the

town of Rock Hill.)

After the Ebenezer review, the governor and Gist spent the night at Stowe's Hotel in Yorkville and then visited Kings Mountain for two days. The governor suggested that a monument should be built to honor the Kings Mountain heroes.

Our traveler returned to Yorkville to watch the 34th Regiment of the state troops parade along with the "Great Norwegian Menagerie," a traveling troop of masqueraders. The masqueraders, led by Capt. Peleg, Q.C. Stone and Philander Doesticks, made their appearance on the "highways and byways of the town, followed by a crowd almost as grotesque and picturesque" as the masqueraders themselves.

The thoughtful traveler then noted that this was much in contrast to former times when a muster brought out less desirable people and the "streets run riot with drunkenness, brawling and fighting."

Several weeks after the review at Ebenezer, members of the Bethel Beat Company No. 2 wrote the Yorkville Enquirer that they thought the militia law to be "onerous and oppressive" and that the whole system was useless. They invited other Beat companies to join them in the protest, "so that we might mount that hobby and ride it out of existence."

□ □ □

*Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop College. Her column appears Sundays.*